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ED 015 794 FS 000 364

FACTORS AFFECTING COGNITIVE GROWTH IN PROJECT HEAD START CHILDREN--WHAT KINDS OF CHANGES OCCUR IN WHAT KINDS OF CHILDREN UNDER WHAT KINDS OF PROGRAMS.

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PUB DATE 10 FEB 68

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.48 10P.

DESCRIPTORS- *PROGRAM EVALUATION, *NATIONAL PROGRAMS, *PRESCHOOL CHILDREN, POVERTY PROGRAMS, *ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, CULTURAL DISADVANTAGEMENT, *ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS, PRESCHOOL EDUCATION, HEADSTART, AERA,

THE HEADSTART PROGRAM, NOW 3 YEARS OLD, IS AN ATTEMPT TO BREAK INTO THE SELF-PERPETUATING "CULTURES OF POVERTY." THE EVALUATION WHICH HAS ACCOMPANIED THIS SOCIAL EXPERIMENT HAS BEEN DIRECTED TOWARDS IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE AND PROFITABLE KINDS OF INTERVENTION. THE OBJECTIVES OF HEADSTART ARE NOT SOLELY ACADEMIC BUT SEEK BROAD IMPROVEMENTS IN THE CHILD'S SOCIAL SKILLS AND HEALTH. HEADSTART OPERATES 6 TO 8 WEEK SUMMER PROGRAMS AND LONGER PROGRAMS WITHIN THE SCHOOL YEAR. DESCRIPTIVE DATA COME FROM A NATIONAL SAMPLE OF 2200 CHILDREN. FUTURE EVALUATION WILL BE BASED ON A SMALLER SAMPLE OBSERVED BY TRAINED EXPERIMENTERS. ALTHOUGH THE POPULATION SERVED BY HEADSTART HAS BEEN FAIRLY STABLE, THE SEVERELY DISADVANTAGED HAVE REMAINED HARD TO REACH. RECRUITING PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL HAS BEEN EASIER THAN ANTICIPATED, BUT FINDING SUB-PROFESSIONAL WORKERS HAS IN SOME AREAS BEEN DIFFICULT. ABOUT 500,000 CHILDREN HAVE BEEN ENROLLED IN EACH SUMMER HEADSTART PROGRAM. THE NUMBER IN THE FULL-YEAR PROGRAMS HAS REACHED A BUDGET-LIMITED 200,000. ABOUT HALF OF THE CHILDREN ARE NEGRO, AND THE SEXES ARE EQUALLY REPRESENTED. THE CHILDREN SHOW THE EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC POVERTY. AS THE STAFF HAS BECOME EXPERIENCED, THE PROGRAMS HAVE BECOME BETTER DIRECTED. ALTHOUGH THE SUCCESS OF HEADSTART CANNOT BE CALLED TOTAL, IT HAS BEEN ENCOURAGING TO ITS INITIAL PROPONENTS. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED IN A SYMPOSIUM AT THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION MEETINGS, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, FEBRUARY 10, 1968. (DR)

ED015794

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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FACTORS AFFECTING COGNITIVE GROWTH IN PROJECT HEAD START CHILDREN:

What Kinds of Changes Occur in What Kinds of Children under What Kinds of Programs

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PS000364

Paper presented in a Symposium at meetings of American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, February 10, 1968.

WHAT KINDS OF CHANGES OCCUR IN WHAT KINDS OF CHILDREN UNDER WHAT KINDS OF PROGRAMS:

The National Evaluation of Head Start

John W. McDavid

In chairing this Symposium on Cognitive Growth in Head Start Children, I am going to confine my remarks to providing you with a conceptual structure into which the five major papers of the symposium will be articulated. I will simply tell you briefly what Head Start *is*, the kinds of children and families it is *serving*, and the kinds of objectives it seeks to *achieve*.

This spring, Head Start will be three years old. It is a massive social experiment to explore ways of intervening into early developmental processes to improve the abilities, attitudes, health, and well-being of young children and their families who live in conditions of dire poverty and resulting sociocultural disadvantage. The Head Start concept has often been treated as though it were entirely a new idea, but this is not in fact true. Schools for children younger than five has existed for 200 years, and their establishment and development has particularly been associated with time of social crisis in Russia, England, and in the United States during the depression of the 1930's and during World War II.

During the 1960's, social scientists began to focus increasing attention upon the existence of "cultures of poverty" that are self-perpetuating to the extent that values, attitudes, abilities, and habits of members of these subcultures are passed along from one generation to the next. Recognizing the implications of these ideas, educators and experts in child development immediately began to frame innovative ideas and plans for extensive programs of intervention into early developmental processes to break the continuing cycle of these cultures of poverty. Thus were born both Title I and Title III of

the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as well as Project Head Start within the Economic Opportunity acts of 1964 and 1966.

Since it is a social experiment, Head Start has been accompanied from its inception by a continuing program of evaluative research. Like most experiments, Head Start was initiated on the basis of a set of general hypotheses based in prior knowledge and theory of human development, education, and relationships between early childhood experience and eventual adult behavior. Furthermore, since Head Start is an experiment, its planners did not expect total and unqualified success in attaining the program's objectives immediately. In any experiment, the first observations of experimental consequences do not usually afford an oversimplified choice between abandoning the experiment as a failure or prepetuating it rigidly as a success. Instead, discoveries serve to redirect efforts along alternative routes, to focus attention in new directions, and to generate new ideas for further experimentation.

Head Start's Research and Evaluation Office has planned its task accordingly: it has not attempted to provide immediate definitive answers about Head Start's ultimate success as a social experiment, but has instead framed a stepwise progression toward learning what kinds of intervention into early development are feasible, practical, and profitable in changing the intellectual and social skills, attitudes, and behavior of children and their families to enable them to produce greater contributions to their society and to enjoy a better mode of living. In brief, the steps in this progression of evaluative research include (a) the full description of the kinds of children and families with whom Head Start works, (b) description of the varieties of intervention programs which may be utilized by Head Start, (c) the establishment of specific relationships between program elements and population characteristics in terms of their consequential outcomes,

and finally (d) the direct evaluation of specific hypotheses about programs and people in terms of their practicality and payoff, in order to afford future guidance for efficient, effective, and economical program planning.

Head Start is more than merely an educational program in the narrow sense of cultivating elementary academic skills. It is concerned with education in a very broad sense, and its objectives include the improvement of not only the child's capacity for responding effectively to the kinds of learning opportunities which will be presented him within the context of formal education, but also to the improvement of his attitudinal and affective structures which influence his motivation, his aspirations, and the goals he sets for himself. It is further concerned with improvement of the child's capacity to relate effectively with other people of all kinds --- his peers as well as adults, from his own socioeconomic and ethnic background as well as from other backgrounds. And finally, it is concerned with the improvement of his physical and medical welfare as a substructure and framework within which his social and intellectual and affective behavior occur. In order to achieve these objectives, Head Start has set as secondary or instrumental goals the improvement of conditions within the family, the neighborhood, and the community, in order to attempt to foster the intended beneficial modifications of the child's behavior itself.

To puruse these objectives, Head Start operates two kinds of programs. The short, intensive summer programs (of six to eight weeks duration) are designed to provide short term stimulation of the child and his family immediately before he enters the regular public school, either at the kindergarten or first grade level depending upon the community in which he resides. Given a circumscribed budget and limited funds, one argument is built on the assumption that if these short-duration programs prove to be effective, more children and families can be directly influenced for a given

dollar cost than would be possible with more expensive programs of longer duration. The second type of Head Start program operates within the framework of a conventional academic year of 8 or 9 months, and a few programs extend to 11 or even 12 months. These are, of course, far more costly, and they can serve a much smaller number of children. Furthermore, since it is difficult to secure personnel and physical facilities of high quality during the regular school year, it is somewhat harder to carry out a top calibre preschool program on the full year basis. Nevertheless, many communities have been successful in mounting such programs, and Head Start has a rather large investment in them.

Within this framework, then, I will attempt to sketch a general framework describing the kinds of children who are in Project Head Start and the kinds of programs Head Start is operating for them. At this stage, I must necessarily confine my remarks to essentially descriptive data. The only integrated data presently available are those derived from a survey approach executed by the Bureau of the Census. The final report on results of our first full-scale elaborate national evaluation program (based on the 1966-67 full year Head Start programs) will not be available until April 1st. This WHICH? evaluation program was conducted through the articulated efforts of a network of 14 Regional Head Start Evaluation and Research Centers located at major universities actively identified with research in child development and early childhood education. Using standardized measures of intellectual and social growth, as well as specially constructed new procedures for assessing these variable and others related to Head Start's overall objectives, a large amount of data were collected on some 2200 children and their families. Simultaneously, data were collected to describe the facilities and personnel and operating principles of the Head Start Child Development Centers in which they were enrolled. The research findings to be discussed by the other participants in this symposium will provide you a glimpse of

the results derived from this effort. But a true integration of these efforts into an overall evaluative picture of Head Start nationally will not be available for another two months.

A similar national evaluation program is under way right now in the same regional Head Start Evaluation and Research Centers. The major shift of approach in the new evaluation is one of abandoning methods and procedures which rest heavily on teacher ratings and other semi-subjective judgments. We found that the vast differences in frame of reference which guide the judgment of different teachers make it difficult if not impossible to pool data on a nationwide scale. Furthermore, shifts in frame of reference over time make one dubious about the interpretation of pre- Head Start and post-Head Start comparisons. The 1967-68 national evaluation of Head Start is a much more costly one, and is based on a reduced number of subjects, since it rests heavily on direct observation by trained experimenters. But we trust that the increased cost and reduced sample size will be more than compensated by gains in the quality and reliability of data obtained.

Let me proceed quickly now to sketch in generally some descriptive data about Head Start children and Head Start programs. We have found in general that the population served by Head Start has remained fairly stable since the first summer programs in 1965. That first summer there were considerable difficulties in recruiting and enrolling the poor children for whom the program is intended, and overtime somewhat greater success has been achieved in reaching these families. Nevertheless, the severely disadvantaged family remains out of the mainstream and relatively inaccessible, and we are still having difficulty locating and enrolling all of the poor children whom we would like to bring into Head Start. While it was anticipated that it might be difficult to recruit fully qualified professional and semi-professional people to carry out the Head Start idea, the response of

these people has been overwhelming from the beginning. At sub-professional levels, qualified personnel remain difficult to locate in some areas of the country, but in such cases a variety of new kinds of training programs have been instituted and Head Start has, on the whole, been fortunate indeed in cultivating the kinds of people it needs to carry out a quality intervention program.

WHAT IS HEAD START AND WHOM DOES IT SERVE:

Since 1965, enrollment in the Summer Head Start programs has held fairly stably at around 500,000 children. This number decreased slightly as many communities who had originally executed Summer programs converted their efforts into full-year programs. While this shift was occurring, budgetary limitations precluded the establishment of other new summer programs, and the result has been an overall decrease in total enrollment. Enrollment in the full-year programs increased rapidly to approximately 200,000 and this figure has held stable, again because of budget restrictions which prohibit establishment of new programs and new Centers. The average age of children in the centers has been about 5 years 10 months, with about 40% of them in the five-year age bracket. Of course, the age mean varies regionally and locally according to whether the community has public school kindergartens or not. Overall, the average age of children in the full-year programs is slightly lower than that in summer programs, since the summer programs are designed for children during the summer just before they enter public school. The full-year programs begin to deal with the children as much as a full year earlier, and in some cases may be integrated with day care facilities which afford the enrollment of children as young as 2½ or 3 years. About half the children have been Negro, and about half are boys and half girls. In addition to white and Negro groups, Head Start has also served significant numbers of

Puerto Rican, Mexican-American, American Indian, and Eskimo families.

The most dramatic descriptive attributes of the children in Head Start show the cultural and social disadvantage that accompanies economic poverty: about 45% of them are reported to have no toys at home, no books or magazines, no crayons or paints or paper. Only 50% of them have seen a physician within the past year, as compared to estimates as high as 80% for middle-class children. Characteristically, they are in poor dental health. Severe malnutrition does not occur uniformly among the poor throughout the country, but in certain areas as many as 75% of the children have been found to be critically anemic and iron-deficient. Severe emotional distrubances have rarely been identified among the Head Starters, perhaps in part because recruiting procedures at the local level screen such children aside for referral to other facilities since Head Start is primarily geared for handling the consequences of sociocultural disadvantage rather than more severe problems. Head Start children have been described in several studies as characteristically restless, anxious, selfish, and unskilled in social interactions with both peers and adults in groups. Where comparisons have been made, Head Start children are uniformly inferior to randomly selected populations on measures of intelligence, academic ability, and school readiness. As compared to middle-class preschoolers, Head Start children have considerably narrower ranges of social experience and are less responsive to opportunities to learn in a variety of experimental situations. Their self-esteem and self-respect tend to be strikingly low, and they tend to be distrustful of others and to perceive teachers as threatening. Interest and enthusiasm for undertaking tasks, presumably a reflection of achievement motivation, is characteristically lacking in Head Start children. Particular disadvantages associated with bilingualism and intercultural conflicts have been identified among Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, and other minority ethnic and linguistic groups. Intellectual deficits are particularly apparent in verbal areas,

the Head Start children tend to be inferior in articulation and use of speech, both as a conceptual tool and as a cummunication tool.

About a third of all Head Start children come from homes with at least one parent absent, and nearly two-thirds of them come from homes containing six or more people. Their families tend to be somewhat out of the mainstreams of communication and involvement with community affairs.

HEAD START PROGRAMS, STAFFS, AND FACILITIES:

The haste with which Head Start programs were mounted during the summer of 1965 was unbelievable, and it is a minor miracle that so many qualified professional and semi-professional people rushed to participate in the program. While the first programs were occasionally criticized as directionless and disorganized, that they operated at all is a significant achievement. Time has lent stability, and by 1967 it was evident that Head Start Center staffs were acquiring both relevant experience and a more adequate sense of direction and commitment to specific objectives and particular means of achieving them. Head Start still remains an unbrella for many different kinds of programs, since specific operating principles are determined at the local level. In 1965, nearly a third of all staff members had had no prior experience with either preschool age children or children from socioculturally disadvantaged backgrounds. By 1967 this figure is down to about 12%, since staff turnover has not yet been enough to prduce the emergency needs of that first summer. Staff members are predominantly women, and it remains difficult to get adult males involved in the program. VISTA volunteers, as well as many kinds of younger volunteers from other sources, participate in the programs.

Over 85% of Head Start programs provide direct social, public health, and welfare assistance to families. Virtually all provide medical and dental diagnosis, and about 90% provide at least some degree of remedial treatment for discovered deficits. The brevity of the summer programs limits the extent

to which medical and dental treatment can be carried out, and current policy allows funding to continue medical follow-up after the summer educational program itself has terminated. The full-year programs have a considerably better record of supplying needed remedial services in the context of medical, dental, and even psycho-social deficits.

Those who have worked in Head Start generally have regarded it as highly effective in achieving its goals and have been eager to continue to participate. Negroes have in some studies been reported to display more enthusiasm and investment in the program than whites, both as workers and at the level of parent participation. White teachers have been described as less accepting the disadvantaged child than Negro teachers, and less optimistic about the probability of their own and Head Start's success in improving the lot of the poor child. Teachers have been found to vary considerably in their personal and experiential qualifications to work with disadvantaged preschoolers, but Head Start has unearthed a rich (although still insufficient) wealth of capable and effective teachers and other personnel.

I would like very much to proceed from here to say more about the successes Head Start has had in achieving the objectives I described earlier. This success has not been total or unqualified, but it certainly has been sufficient to provide direct encouragement to those who initially endorsed the principles behind Head Start. The research findings reported by those who follow me in this symposium are representative of the kinds of investigations which will guide the future planning and development of Head Start. A fuller report on our national evaluation programs, when it is available this spring, will further amplify them.